VZCZCXRO1115
PP RUEHDBU RUEHIK RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHKV #4383/01 3330956
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 290956Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY KYIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0489
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KYIV 004383

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PREL UP
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: VOTERS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN
LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: KYIV 4211

(U) Sensitive but unclassified, please handle accordingly.
Not for internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Embassy, representatives from several
USG-funded NGO's (NDI, IRI, Freedom House and IOM) and
monitors from ENEMO (European Network of Election Monitoring
Organizations) observed four repeat mayoral elections this
month, all in the central Ukraine heartland which gave
pluralities to the Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT) in March 26
parliamentary elections. With the West still heavily
pro-orange and the East locked down in the Regions camp, the
center of the country remains Ukraine's swing vote, as it was
in the 1994, 1999, and 2004 Presidential cycles. The
by-election winners came from a variety of parties--one
Regions, two BYuTs, and either a Communist or an Our Ukraine
rep.

¶2. (SBU) The bottom line seems to be that local politics
remains local, and often personality rather than
party-driven. National parties were often detached from
their candidates or supported more than one candidate.
Candidates who actually worked to improve their constituents'
lives or who were young and fresh or, in at least one case,
who represented the security of the past for the mostly
elderly electorate that turned out, found support. On the
other hand, former mayors who tried to manipulate the system
from their new home in the Rada were not able to hold on to
their powerbases. Voter turnout was low (20-30 percent,
compared to 70-80 percent in the March general election), a
sign perhaps of voter weariness at the fifth voting day in
little over two years. End summary and comment.

Local Elections: Take Two (or three)

¶3. (SBU) Chernihiv, Poltava, Kirovohrad, and Cherkasy form a
ring around Kyiv's eastern and southern borders and have a
more politically-diverse political landscape than their
neighbors to the west and east, although all gave strong
pluralities to BYuT in the March 26 Rada elections. The
first three oblasts held mayoral by-elections on November 26
to replace mayors who joined the Rada, while Cherkasy held a
repeat election on November 5 after two previous failed
attempts. In general, voter turnout was low (20-35 percent),
as people disgusted with political games surrounding repeat
elections stopped participating. In Poltava, however, the
city where the municipal government functioned best under an
acting mayor and new city council, people still believed
their votes mattered, according to an exit poll conducted by
the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU), and this was
probably reflected in the slightly higher voter turnout (33
percent) there.

Kirovohrad: Still Flawed

¶4. (SBU) Kirovohrad, home to some of Ukraine's most blatant
cheating in the 1998 and 2002 local/parliamentary elections
as well as the first and second rounds of the 2004
presidential election, was the messiest of the four mayoral
elections. A leading candidate, Oleksandr Nikulin,
previously mayor of Kirovohrad from 1998-2002, was improperly
removed from the ballot at midnight before election day by
the territorial election commission (TEC). According to
Nikulin's camp and confirmed by CVU, only 9 of the 15 TEC
members were present at the vote--two-thirds are required for
quorum--and the local court reinstated him hours before the
polls opened. The TEC then overruled the court, removed
Nikulin again, and decided to declare invalid any votes for
Nikulin that were cast during the two-hour period when he was
reinstated, resulting in several thousand votes being thrown
out. The uncertainty about the validity of Nikulin's
candidacy caused chaos in several polling stations as local
officials tried to decide whether or not to strike his name
from the ballots--as the first voters of the day were
arriving.

¶5. (SBU) Prior to election day, local residents talked about
a lack of leadership in the city, with some hinting darkly
that the "interim authorities" would prefer to have no one
win the election, leaving them with the reins of local power.
 Valeriy Kalchenko (BYuT, former Kirovohrad governor in
1999), won the mayor's race in March while managing BYuT's
successful Rada campaign in the province, but he chose to
take up his Rada seat instead of serving as mayor.   In
August, Kirovohrad journalists and city council members told
us that after Kalchenko's departure, BYuT found no one to
fill the void. Instead, Kirovohrad experienced a sense of

drift and lack of municipal leadership over the summer. The
interim authorities decision to significantly delay the start
of municipal heating--the only such occurrence in a oblast
capital country-wide this year, angered local residents.

¶6. (SBU) Overall, voter turnout was low, about 20 percent and
primarily pensioners. After the initial chaos of the
morning, the vast majority of polling places functioned
smoothly, with poll workers taking professional pride in
doing a good job. As of November 29, there still was no
official winner although early exit polls gave the nod by a
narrow margin appears to Communist Volodymyr Puzakov over Our
Ukraine's Oleksandr Danutsa (15.8 to 15.3 percent). Danutsa
was the only one out of 44 candidates who is under 50 years
of age; a young city council member who started his political
career after the Orange Revolution. He impressed us during a
brief August encounter as a person to watch for the future.
The de-registered Nikulin has already contested the election
in the local court; with apparent legal grounds for a
successful challenge, Kirovohrad may see a repeat election in
a few months.

Poltava: Electing a Mayor Who Gets Things Done
--- -

¶7. (SBU) Poltava in March re-elected Regions MP Anatoliy
Kukoba, who had run Poltava like a personal fiefdom since
before Ukrainian independence, but Kukoba also chose to take
his Rada seat rather than serve as mayor. The difference
from Kirovohrad, however, was that the interim mayor chosen
by the BYuT-led City Council, 42 year old Council Secretary
Andriy Matkovskiy, made a quick splash, according to many we
talked to in Poltava November 25-26. The Matkovskiy-led City
Council tackled a number of quality of life issues, achieving
"more in five months than Kukoba had done in five years,"
quipped one Poltavan. City Councilwoman Hanna Kyshchenko
(BYuT) told us that the Council had significantly expanded
street lighting (provincial Ukrainian cities are
disconcertingly dark at night), bought more city buses and
playground equipment, and repaired some long-neglected roads.

¶8. (SBU) The results showed on election day, when Matkovskiy
scored a resounding victory, with the CVU exit polls
suggesting a 56-27 percent victory over closest competitor
Viktor Zhivotenko. Zhivotenko, who as the "non-Kukoba"
opposition candidate in the March election had come within
1500 votes of upsetting Kukoba, had Kukoba and Regions
throwing their last minute support behind him. Several
observers suggested Kukoba's team was attempting to prevent
the emergence of a long-term effective BYuT mayor. Some of
the last minute tactics seemed out of character for the
Zhivotenko team, including a "black PR TV documentary"
alleging Matkovskiy had shady ties which ran in the week
prior to the election, and election day efforts to
manufacture the appearance of possible vote buying and
carousel voting among students, allegedly on Matkovskiy,s
behalf. (Note: Matkovskiy has now filed defamation law suits
against some of the media outlets that he says tried to smear
him before the election.)

¶9. (SBU) The Poltava by-election was the most relaxed,
tension-free and straightforward Ukrainian election yet
witnessed by the members of the embassy observer team, who
had a combined 15 election observations since 2004. One
precinct committee member summed up a prevailing sentiment by
saying: "Both Matkovskiy and Zhivotenko are local Poltava
boys with proven management capabilities. We can't lose
either way." Moreover, Poltava saw a slightly higher voter
turnout of 33 percent, and of those who did vote, 90 percent
told the CVU exit pollers that they believed their vote could
make a difference in how Poltava was governed.

Chernihiv: Political Comeback

¶10. (SBU) The story in Chernihiv was much the same. The
initial March winner of the mayor's seat, Socialist Mykola
Rudkovskiy, left for Kyiv to take his Rada seat, subsequently
becoming Transportation Minister. Rudkovskiy had been
dynamic and charismatic in his campaign in March, but when he
left, he installed SPU people in city positions and tried to
run things through a proxy, which engendered hostility
towards the SPU (note: the Socialists experienced a dramatic
drop in support levels nationwide after their July "flip"
from supporting a governing coalition with BYuT and OU to the
current Regions-led coalition including the Communists). As
a result, former mayor (2002-06) and Regions candidate
Oleksandr Sokolov, who had had lost to Rudkovskiy in March,
easily won in November by an overwhelming margin. Voting in
Chernihiv was very quiet and orderly. Embassy observers did

not sense the same feeling of apathy as in other cities,
although voter turnout was still a low 25 percent.

Cherkasy: Finally, a Mayor

¶11. (SBU) The November 5 Cherkasy election (described reftel)
was relatively quiet after political machinations canceled
the results in March and prevented a revote in June. There
was low voter turnout of 20 percent with high levels of voter
disgust. Former mayor Oliynik, who is now a BYuT MP in the
Rada, controlled a lot of the technical candidates and the
press attention, but still couldn't get his preferred
candidate into office. (Note: he came in fourth). Instead,
young businessman and second BYuT candidate Serhiy Odarych
won.

Voters Dislike Politicians who Can't Shake Old Habits
--- --------

¶12. (SBU) Comment: Taken together, the four mayoral elections
demonstrate positive elements of Ukraine's post-Orange
Revolution political scene.   What we observed were contested
elections by different parties and perspectives, with local

dynamics and personalities decisive in the final result,
rather than attempts of long-time provincial godfathers
trying to continue to run their home cities from Kyiv. The
results in Poltava in particular showed that competent
municipal governance can make a quick impact, with Poltavan
voters handing a decisive mandate to someone whom few had
heard of six months prior. Nevertheless, the continued use
by some of old campaign tactics--using the TECs and the
courts to try to disqualify competitors and "black PR" to
discredit them--suggests that some old habits die hard.

¶13. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Taylor